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Argentina

HUMAN RIGHTS

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

(X) Release ( ) Excise ( ) Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: ( ) In Part (X) In Full

( ) Classify as ( ) Extend as ( ) Downgrade to

Date Declassify on Reason

I. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The human rights situation in Argentina is the principal obstacle to closer relations. If the situation does not improve soon, it may become impossible to justify further arms transfers or avoid negative votes in the international financial institutions (separate issues).

The Argentine government continues to refuse to acknowledge the names of thousands of political prisoners under detention; disappearances, summary executions of prisoners, torture, prolonged periods of incommunication, intimidation of lawyers, and instances of anti-Semitism are undeniable.

The Argentine government is fully aware of the priority attached by the Administration to human rights. They know our relationships are endangered. The President's broad policy is there for all to read, and, in private talks with Argentine leaders, Vance, Blumenthal and Brzezinski have underlined the Administration's concern, something that was lacking previously. While it is unrealistic to think that American pressure will force the Argentine government to go easy on terrorists and their suspected allies, it has helped to sensitize the Argentines to international public opinion and brought about certain developments that might not have taken place otherwise. Prisoner lists are now being published as individuals are placed under executive custody, although these lists are incomplete. The International Committee of the Red Cross is visiting prisons. The charging or release of state of siege prisoners has been stepped up. And there is reason to hope that the "right of option", whereby Argentines may opt for voluntary exile, may soon be reinstituted.

II. FOREIGN GOVERNMENT POSITION

The GOA will declare that it inherited a terrible problem, and that it is dealing with terrorists who have no respect whatsoever for human rights. Nevertheless, President Videla acknowledged publicly in Caracas that abuses have taken place. Privately, the GOA may say that steps have been taken to correct abuses arising from the loose decentralization of counterterrorist forces.

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### III. OUR POSITION

We fully accept the premise that the GOA inherited an impossible situation in March 1976. Even the Peronist Parliament and unions stood aside to permit the military to do their job. Now, almost 18 months later, the military have largely accomplished their security goals but continue to move very slowly toward the restoration of legal forms and political peace. On the contrary, certain elements in the security forces are seeking further polarization of society in order to build a "new" society free of whatever right wing extremists dislike.

### IV. SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS

- The United States recognizes that Argentina has been the victim of a brutal terrorist onslaught seeking to destroy society.
- The first major victory of the terrorists probably came when the legal system found itself unable to cope with the situation due to the intimidation of judges.
- The terrorists scored another major victory when Argentina's political institutions failed to produce leadership and the military took over to avert economic and political chaos.
- After a year and a half in power, the Argentine government has decisively mastered the security situation in the country but as yet it does not appear to be moving to abolish lawlessness.
- American labor, including the AFL-CIO, is very concerned over recent actions against even the moderate leadership of Argentina's unions; the continued harassment of lawyers and the shocking abduction in Buenos Aires of your Ambassador to Venezuela are distressing.
- The forces of terrorism now seem to have a chance to accomplish two more major goals:
  - (1) The Argentine Military appear to be split on the need for political peace, thereby prolonging the society's agony;
  - (2) Inasmuch as counterterrorist excesses continue, the terrorists will succeed in driving a wedge between the United States and Argentina.

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- We want the Argentine government to succeed because it says it is committed to Western values and if this is demonstrated to the world, our hemisphere will benefit.

- Both for the sake of Argentina and our relations, we think it essential for the government to recognize its unquestioned strength and begin to gamble dramatically on the side of peace.

- The impression must be corrected that the Argentine government is not in full control and must resort to mysterious right wing forces and unexplained disappearances to root out terrorism.

- We strongly urge the acknowledgment of all prisoners under detention, the restoration of due process, and the punishment of all excesses. —Perhaps the "right of option" which allows Argentine citizens to leave the country rather than being held without charges might be restored.

- In sum, we are anxious to see the Argentine government reflect the values most Argentines and the Western world share.

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